

Message

**From:** Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality [rwilbur@mdeq.ms.gov]  
**Sent:** 7/23/2018 1:23:17 PM  
**To:** Marraccini, Davina [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=66fecfe52dc84d8db7ab0859adee8426-Marraccini, Davina]  
**Subject:** News Clippings July 23, 2018 -- Full Stories

**State**

**Who will pay for the estimated \$340 million One Lake project?**

Clarion Ledger

Property owners who benefit from the One Lake Project would likely face a special assessment tax if the estimated \$340 million project becomes reality.

But supporters say the One Lake Project would benefit those property owners by lowering their flood insurance cost, leading to savings on homeowners' insurance premiums because they would no longer be in the floodplain.

The savings on flood insurance would offset the increase in taxes, said Keith Turner, attorney for the Rankin-Hinds Pearl River Flood & Drainage Control District, which is spearheading the One Lake Project.

Turner said the average cost for flood insurance in a floodplain is about \$700 to \$1,000 a year, but said the special assessment tax would be roughly \$200 or \$300 a year. He cautioned that is only an estimate.

The project is a long way from a done deal, but a decision could be made by federal officials by the end of the year on whether it will gain final approval.

If the project gains approval, then a key question is where will the money come from to complete it over the estimated three-year time frame for construction?

The One Lake plan, which can trace its winding roots back to the historic 1979 Easter flood, calls for widening the Pearl River south of the Ross Barnett Reservoir to below Jackson.

Opponents say there are less disruptive flood control options. One Lake construction would mean dredging to widen the Pearl, impounding 1,500 water acres with a new weir or low-head dam, and filling 1,000 acres of wetlands, which opponents say would remove seven miles of habitat for two federally protected species: Gulf sturgeon and the ringed sawback turtle.

Mississippi Chapter Sierra Club Director Louie Miller said his organization "is adamantly opposed to spending taxpayer dollars to finance private real estate development at the expense of our natural resources, which is the sole origin for this project."

The One Lake Project's stated goal is to mitigate flooding by becoming a spillover dam for the Ross Barnett Reservoir. But the plan would go further by opening up additional public access to the Pearl River that could lead to recreational and economic development.

Congress earmarked \$134 million for the the project more than a decade ago. However, Turner said the \$134 million hasn't been received, and it will be a process to receive the money if the project is given the go-ahead.

Turner said an estimated \$340 million will be needed for the entire project, but the actual construction cost would be less.

The district's plan is to use federal state funds and the district's taxing authority to pay for the project.

District leaders estimate another \$150 million must be secured beyond the federal earmark.

This year, the Legislature considered approving \$50 million in general obligation bonds for One Lake, but the bill died near the end of the session.

Turner said the district still has to work out how much in state bonds would be needed for the project.

The other part of the district's funding plan is its taxing authority. The district has had taxing authority since it was created decades ago, but the Legislature extended the district's taxing reach last year.

A House bill passed in 2017 gives the district flexibility to adjust any future taxes for the lake between those with property directly benefiting from being waterfront and those with less or no direct benefit — instead of levying a flat rate for all properties in the district.

The two counties, Hinds and Rankin, would collect any assessment imposed by the district on property owners and distribute it to the district.

Similar to the Ross Barnett area, the district has taxing authority, but Turner said the district would operate on a much smaller scale and wouldn't have such things as its own police force. The Reservoir Police provides law enforcement within the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, which oversees the 33,000-acre Barnett Reservoir and the 17,000 acres surrounding it.

John Sigman, reservoir general manager, said the reservoir district once received tax money, but not anymore. He said the district's primary budget is from rental agreements with the 6,000 leaseholders of reservoir property. Reservoir property isn't sold; it can only be leased. The Pearl River Valley Water Supply District doesn't receive any state or local tax dollars, Sigman said.

For the current budget year, the Legislature appropriated \$18.2 million in special fund money for the reservoir district. Special fund means the money didn't come from tax dollars.

Sigman said the reservoir board is taking no position on the One Lake Project.

The nonprofit Pearl Riverkeeper, which advocates for the health of the Pearl River Basin, said the One Lake Project potentially could negatively impact the state's \$891 million-a-year seafood industry.

Proponents say that wouldn't happen because the project would have to meet minimum outflow levels with emergency gates to the weir to ensure those levels are maintained, even in extreme drought conditions.

According to the district's presentation on the project, "with no perceptible decrease in water flowing downstream from Jackson, and with two-thirds of the Pearl River watershed actually south of Jackson, the project should have no impact on salinity levels in the Gulf."

<https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2018/07/20/who-pays-one-lake-project/791503002/>

### **Waste Pro partners with DeSoto County on curbside recycling program**

#### **Commercial Appeal**

A curbside recycling service is helping DeSoto County residents save both the environment and county dollars.

Waste Pro's curbside recycling program began in October, following multiple proposals, long negotiations and a new garbage collection contract. The free service works in conjunction with standard trash pickup and collects recyclable items on the same scheduled day.

Ray Laughter, DeSoto County director of environmental services, said getting the program up and running has been a priority.

"The board of supervisors has long had a vision for this service within the county," Laughter said. "This unique opportunity saw the board's vision come to fruition."

There are 14,500 serviceable garbage units eligible for curbside recycling in the unincorporated parts of DeSoto County. Of those, about 4,500 units are currently participating in the service.

Waste Pro municipal marketing director Lori Cate said the number of curbside recycling participants has grown steadily, mirroring DeSoto County's rising population. With that in mind, an emphasis has been placed on educating residents who may be unaware of the program.

"Waste Pro was on the square in Hernando for Earth Day festivities promoting the service and signing up any interested families," Cate said. "Education is a large part of the success of

any recycling program, and DeSoto County and Waste Pro continue to partner to educate residents about the recycling service offered."

Eligible residents can sign up for curbside recycling online at [www.wasteprousa.com](http://www.wasteprousa.com), or by calling (901) 236-0660. Once enrolled, Waste Pro will deliver a 96-gallon rolling garbage cart to the applicant's address.

Carts must be placed on the curb with the handles facing toward the house, no later than 7 a.m. on a resident's scheduled collection day. When a designated holiday falls on a weekday, pickup occurs one day later than normal for the rest of the week.

"Recyclable materials are collected and taken to a materials recovery facility (MRF) in Memphis for processing, unlike garbage, which is disposed of at the landfill," Cate said.

Waste Pro handles and recycles most paper, metal cans, glass and plastic.

While DeSoto County hasn't started running any official numbers yet, Laughter said the board is expecting positive results once Waste Pro's curbside recycling program reaches the one-year mark.

"Based on our estimates, we feel we will see a significant reduction in disposal cost within the county budget," Laughter said.

<https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/news/local/suburbs/desoto/2018/07/22/desoto-county-curbside-recycling-waste-pro/770409002/>

### **City hears mixed news on interceptor project**

Enterprise-Journal

There are gray clouds and silver linings financially for McComb on its Northwest Interceptor sewer improvement project.

David Bowman of Neel-Schaffer engineering firm told selectmen at Tuesday's work session that the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality is disallowing reimbursement of \$274,000 spent out of water and sewer fund reserves for land acquisition and rights of way. A provision for reimbursement of land acquisition spending was included in the paperwork for the revolving loan the city received from MDEQ, even though the state does not allow such reimbursements.

"They apologized and said they should not have put that in there," Bowman said. "It will not be reimbursed through the loan. That's the danger of a regulatory agency being in control of a loan program. ... There's nothing we can do."

Bowman and Finance Director Janice Dillon said the city would have had to spend that money anyway, and it would have been paid back over the term of the loan if the reimbursement had gone through.

"If it helps, the bids on the project came in much less than the estimate," which the city used to secure the loan, Bowman said.

He also said Neel-Schaffer and the city had estimated \$375,000 would be needed for land acquisitions and rights of way, and the city actually spent about \$100,000 less.

Selectman Michael Cameron added that since the city won't get money for the land acquisition that it has to pay back, there will be no interest charges to pay on that money, either.

[http://www.enterprise-journal.com/news/article\\_ab7ddbe8-8ba6-11e8-be7a-e7cc69f9e92d.html](http://www.enterprise-journal.com/news/article_ab7ddbe8-8ba6-11e8-be7a-e7cc69f9e92d.html)

### **Green Tee sewer work nears start**

Daily Journal

TUPELO – Efforts to replace inadequate sewer infrastructure in the Green Tee neighborhood should ramp up later this summer.

In a move particularly welcomed by District 4 Supervisor Tommie Lee Ivy, the Board of Supervisors voted on Monday to award a project contract to Argo Construction, of Cordova, Tennessee.

That project carries a price tag of about \$570,000. Federal money provided through the Community Development Block Grant program will cover half the project's costs, while Tupelo Water & Light will provide the rest, according to TWL Director Johnny Timmons. The selected bid was lower than original project estimates. Upon the construction of Green Tee some decades ago, the developer built the homes such that pairs of home share a connection – or tap – to the main sewer line in the street. This arrangement is often called a "Y tap" or a "common tap." Tupelo building codes have historically barred this practice, but the Green Tee subdivision was built outside the city limits. Common taps are easily blocked. As a result of this shoddy construction, Green Tee residents have for decades suffered from foul smells and even sewage backups into homes. Officials and residents estimate that anywhere from 140 to 170 home are affected by the inadequate sewer infrastructure. Ivy, who represents the area of the county where Green Tee is located, was keen on Monday to determine when construction on the project might begin. David Long, with Cook Coggins Engineers, said a pre-construction conference should occur within three to four weeks, with work likely beginning shortly thereafter. Tupelo acquired the Green Tee sewer system as a package deal when it purchased the Haven Acres sewer system decades ago in order to annex the Haven Acres neighborhood. Thus, even though Green Tee remains outside the city limits, TWL owns the sewer system there. Residents pay a higher out-of-city rate. Sewer infrastructure in Haven Acres was similarly upgraded using CDBG funding. This CDBG money comes through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. [http://www.djournal.com/news/local/green-tee-sewer-work-nears-start/article\\_134ac396-5731-5e26-b718-073f77e09bd1.html](http://www.djournal.com/news/local/green-tee-sewer-work-nears-start/article_134ac396-5731-5e26-b718-073f77e09bd1.html)

#### **State acquires nearly 18,000 acres in south Delta** Clarion Ledger

Hunters have watched for months as the sale of approximately 17,816 acres progressed, and this week it was announced the transaction is complete. The land, which is currently named Steele Bayou Wildlife Management Area, is located in Issaquena and Warren counties and the acquisition is considered a step forward for conservation and hunting opportunities. "For us, it's just that iconic piece of the Delta in one big block," said Alex Littlejohn, associate state director of The Nature Conservancy. "The habitat component and benefits it provides in combination with it being that iconic Mississippi River bottomland provides so many conservation benefits." The Nature Conservancy worked with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks to complete the purchase of the land from Anderson-Tully. The department used existing funds and matching federal Wildlife Restoration Program funds. The Nature Conservancy took on the financial burden of almost 7,000 acres. The Caterpillar Foundation, Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks Foundation and Entergy Mississippi also assisted in the purchase. According to Littlejohn, The Nature Conservancy will be reimbursed by MDWFP over a period of time for its contribution. "The plan right now is the next three to four years, in that time frame," Littlejohn said. The purchase helps preserve a part of the Delta that has largely disappeared from the landscape. According to The Nature Conservancy, only about two percent of the Delta's hardwood bottomland forests remain. The land is also adjacent to Mahannah WMA and the combined acreage, 30,511, makes it the second-largest tract of land owned by MDWFP. Only the 37,415-acre Pascagoula River WMA is larger. "It's been an exciting process and an exciting acquisition," Littlejohn said. "It's the largest piece the state's acquired since that (Pascagoula River WMA) purchase. "That was 40 years ago. These opportunities just don't come along that often."



The land also offers some of the best hunting opportunities in the state. With its rich soil, the Delta is known for producing trophy deer and lots of them. Located in the Mississippi River Flyway, Steele Bayou WMA's flooded timber is prime winter habitat for waterfowl. Littlejohn said it also offers wildlife-watching and fishing opportunities.

"It's that traditional Delta wildlife from white-tails to waterfowl out there," Littlejohn said. "It's a very diverse habitat with a diverse range of species."

"This property has something for everyone. It was bought by hunters for hunters, but they aren't the only ones who will use it. It's a special place."

Steele Bayou WMA is expected to open some time in 2019, but how hunters will be permitted to hunt is currently unclear. At some WMAs hunters are only required to check in and out. At others, hunters receive permits by drawings. For now, hunters can only wait to see how it plays out.

"Right now, we really can't tell you anything," said Amy Blaylock, MDWFP director of Wildlife Resources. "We haven't made any decisions as to how we're going to manage it."

<https://www.clarionledger.com/story/sports/outdoors/2018/07/21/deer-duck-hunting-mississippi/805807002/>

### **Vacancy at Okhissa Lake — Group hopes Fed will sell public land**

Daily Leader

He put in around noon on Friday.

Summit's Donald Broussard backed his 16-foot SunCatcher pontoon off the trailer and into the black water of Okhissa Lake, swinging it around carefully to glide into the floating dock. Nearby, the women sprayed sunscreen and hung floaties on the children, and the boys threw rocks into the duckweed. Onboard, they had grocery bags, a propane grill and not one fishing pole.

"Soon as I get out in the lake, I'm gonna start cooking for these kids," Broussard said. "We come up here all the time, and if they had cabins or something like that, I'd rent one, even though I just live an hour away."

There are no cabins. No lodges. Not even overnight camping. Okhissa Lake has a few covered pavilions and some restrooms, but no places to stay within 30 miles.

A local economic development group wants to change that, and they're on the verge of getting permission to buy up 150 acres of publicly-owned land in the Homochitto National Forest for the construction of rental property on the lake, if federal lawmakers greenlight the current version of the national farm bill.

Section 8633 of the amended Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, labeled "Okhissa Lake Rural Economic Development Land Conveyance," authorizes the Scenic Rivers Development Alliance to purchase 150 acres on the lake near Bude for fair market value, with the National Forest Service shedding all right and title to the property via quitclaim deed. Meadville Mayor Lane Reed — who works with the alliance through the town's partnership with alliance member Franklin County — said the alliance is seeking the land to develop rental property and other amenities around Okhissa Lake to help promote the lake as a regional destination for recreation.

"We are primarily looking for a hotel that would serve as a centerpiece for the 11-county area of Southwest Mississippi that would aid in development around our lake," he said. "Scenic Rivers has become very active in promoting outdoor events, and there's not really a place large enough here that can host those events. There is a tremendous need for, for lack of a better word, a centralized hotel in Southwest Mississippi."

The amendment was inserted into the farm bill by Republican U.S. Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith of Brookhaven. It calls for the acreage, located near the intersection of U.S. Hwy. 98 and Berrytown Road on Okhissa Lake's northwest corner, to be appraised according to federal standards and paid for in cash, with Scenic Rivers paying the price and the cost of any appraisals or environmental studies.

The amendment gives the alliance 180 days from the passage of the farm bill to submit its purchase request in writing. It also allows the government to determine if the sale is in the public interest and to proceed with a public or private sale.

The farm bill has passed both the House and Senate and is currently in conference committee.

The Daily Leader has attempted to contact Hyde-Smith for comment on her amendment since July 12. Emails, voicemails and text messages to her and her staff were not returned. Scenic Rivers is an alliance among the boards of supervisors of Amite, Franklin, Pike and Walthall counties, as well as the City of McComb, the Pike County Economic Development District and the Wilkinson County Industrial Development Authority. It was made official in near-unanimous votes in the state House and Senate earlier this year and signed into law by Gov. Phil Bryant.

The alliance stepped in to take over management of the Bogue Chitto Water Park, given to Pike County upon the closure of the Pearl River Basin Development District, which ran out of funding and shut down July 1.

#### **Promises were made**

Reed said development around Okhissa Lake isn't a new idea. Plans for the lake were first dreamed up in the 1960s, and former U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran worked on the project for years before it finally came together in the 1990s under the National Forest Service.

Okhissa Lake opened in 2007. It features 1,075 acres of water, 39 miles of shoreline, two boat ramps, restrooms, a gazebo and parking areas. The NFS estimates 10,000 people visited the lake in 2017.

Reed said development at the lake wasn't supposed to end with restrooms and parking lots. "We have a beautiful 1,200-acre lake that, for various reasons, the forest service hasn't been able to, or chose not to, develop," he said. "We took 1,200 acres out of timber production for a lake, and now we have day fishing here — you're not going to have people come from Texas or Georgia to do a one-day fishing trip."

NFS spokesman Mario Rossilli said in a statement the organization issued requests for proposals for further development when the lake opened and has received no responses. "To this point, it seems that there has not been sufficient commercial interest to support further economic development of Okhissa Lake," he said. "In June 2012, a limited market analysis of Okhissa Lake found that there were no opportunities for investors to make a profit through development of RV camping and cabins."

Reed — an attorney who specializes in real estate and corporate law — countered lease terms in the forest service's RFPs did not leave investors enough time to recoup and profit. He said the organization did not craft its nationwide RFP process to fit the specifics of Southwest Mississippi.

The alliance believes times have changed since the forest service issued its call for investors and wants a crack at the job.

"We're optimistic we'd have some different developers take a look at the project if we can get that far down the road," said Joseph Parker, executive director for Scenic Rivers. "Marketing and promotion is the very first thing we'll have to do. We all recognize we have to let everybody know about the great asset we have."

#### **This land is your land**

Privatizing a chunk of the Homochitto National Forest — even though the tract is small — brings to Southwest Mississippi a political debate seldom seen on the east side of the Mississippi River.

The selling of public land out west, where the federal government owns 46 percent of the 11 traditionally western states, is a contentious issue and a Republican-led effort dating back 10 years to former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's infamous comment to "drill, baby, drill" for oil on federal land.

The Obama administration extended federal land protections by adding 34 new national monuments, the most by any president. The Trump administration has moved in the opposite direction, rolling back some designations. Ranchers, developers and mineral producers mostly support the sale or transfer of federal land into state hands — states have a track

record of selling it — while outdoorsmen like hunters and hikers tend to rally toward public lands advocacy groups.

But it's largely a western fight, focused on millions of acres of desert, prairie and mountains. The Wilderness Society, the Outdoor Alliance, the Izaak Walton League and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers — all of which work to protect public lands and access — declined to comment for this story.

#### **This land is my land**

Reed believes the loss of 150 acres of national forest land — a small section of the Homochitto's nearly 192,000 acres — will help the public enjoy the land, not hinder it.

"That land was to be held in public trust, but due to environmental restrictions there's not as much timber cutting, and that doesn't generate the revenue for Franklin County that it would if it was in private hands and taxed," he said. "If we can take some of that land and develop it, put tax dollars into Franklin County, we're going to give the public even better access.

Outdoors recreation is what we're known for, and what we're good at."

Bobby Moak, head of the Mississippi Democratic Party and a former 30-year state lawmaker who represented part of Franklin County, was a member of the House Ways and Means Committee in the late 1990s and helped get the Okhissa Lake project finalized with a \$6 million bond bill for road construction. That done, Cochran pushed the project into the federal appropriations bill that passed on Nov. 29, 1999.

Moak agreed "the ball was dropped" on developing the lake, and he praised Scenic Rivers and the group's efforts at promoting the region. He said the group should be allowed to try, but provisions should be made to return the 150 acres to the forest service if the project fails.

"As long as that property is not going to be able to be sold to individuals or get outside the public realm," Moak said. "That whole area is very tender because people actually had to leave their farms and homes for the lake to be built, and for the most part they did so willingly. I would certainly want to have a kicker in the amendment that adds onto the quitclaim deed saying it would not be transferred to any private individuals at any time."

#### **Agreement could be tough**

The project has a long way to go, and Hyde-Smith's amendment is riding in a farm bill with controversial requirements.

It passed the House by two votes, 213-211, with new rules for food stamps that would require able-bodied recipients to work at least 20 hours per week to receive benefits. The new requirement was inserted by Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. The Senate version of the bill, which contained no work requirements, passed easily, 86-11.

If the bill comes out of conference with Ryan's food stamp changes intact, it will face another Senate review likely absent of Democratic support. It will need 60 votes to pass, and the Republican-Democrat split in the chamber is 51-47.

With such a battle looming, the alliance has yet to develop costs, funding sources or conceptual plans for developing Okhissa Lake, Reed said.

"We have not gotten the cart ahead of the horse, nor will we," he said. "I don't think that's even on the radar yet until we get a final bill."

<https://www.dailyleader.com/2018/07/20/vacancy-at-okhissa-lake-group-hopes-fed-will-sell-public-land/>

#### **Electric car chargers in downtown Meridian**

WTOK

The city of Meridian teamed up with Mississippi Power to install two new electric car charging stations.

"Seeing more and more of the electronic cars around, people are getting more conscientious about how we can save energy. There are some definite benefits to having those types of cars," says Laura Carmichael, Community Development Director for the city of Meridian.

"It's good for us because it shows a lot of cities that have these downtown that Meridian is progressing," says Meridian Mayor Percy Bland.

The average hybrid car takes about two or three hours just to charge. City officials believe having these chargers downtown will allow people to explore everything the city has to offer, while also charging their cars.

"We feel like we are going to have a lot more visitors with all the museums and things that are coming to downtown. We felt this would be a good opportunity to test and see whether or not this would be something that works for our city," explains Carmichael.

So far, two chargers have been installed in downtown - one directly in front of City Hall and the other inside the parking garage.

"Those who are maybe coming to park for the day or driving to work, they can certainly use that and park and charge up while they are working," says Carmichael.

"It's just really fun and good to have it right downtown and right in front of City Hall," says Bland.

There are also other chargers on private properties such as Bonita Lakes Mall.

These electric car chargers cost the city of Meridian no money to be installed. They were installed by Mississippi Power. The company is installing car chargers all over the state.

<http://www.wtok.com/content/news/Electric-car-charges-in-downtown-Meridian-488845061.html>

### **Ingalls engineers promote STEM-related fields in workshop with local teachers** Mississippi Press

PASCAGOULA, Miss. -- STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) fields are the future of this nation and for the seventh year, Ingalls Shipbuilding is doing its part in educating teachers from around the Gulf Coast about STEM and how they can integrate experiments in their classrooms.

Friday's workshop included about 10 teachers from Pascagoula, Moss Point, Ocean Springs and Gulfport where hands-on experiments were conducted to give teachers an idea of how to spark their students interest in possibly pursuing a career in STEM.

Davida Cunningham, Mechanical Engineer at Ingalls said it is important to promote STEM-related fields to middle and high school students because it will allow them to see what the jobs will be available to them and how lucrative the jobs are.

"The United States as a whole is not being promoted as one of the top nations in this arena, so we want to make sure that we are remaining up-to-date and keeping them ready for the workforce," she said. "This helps the shipyard and local community in providing training and have it regurgitated within the classroom."

Nikeland Cooper is a Physical Science Teacher at Ocean Springs High School and said he felt it was important to attend the workshop because his students have an interest in pursuing majors in STEM at the collegiate level and in turn, a career.

"I decided to attend to become immersed in one of our local communities here and how they give back to the community through STEM," he said. "I believe the world is trending in the direction of technical jobs therefore, I need to become abreast of information I can relay to my students about potential career choices offered locally and nationally."

Cooper said his students are interested in STEM because either a family member has a career in the field or simply, they have a general interest based on everyday interactions such as video games, self-checkout in grocery stores and automation.

"The same type of skills required for everyday encounters with STEM are what is required to build ships here at the shipyard, so the students have the potential to have a great career here at Ingalls that will further their skills and craft," Cooper said.

Leslie Pollard, sixth grade Science teacher at Magnolia Middle School in Moss Point said her students interest in STEM is deep and Friday's workshop will allow her to introduce a bevy of ideas and experiments that will pique their interest.

"Today, I learned about the impact Ingalls has on our community and I can take that back into the classroom," Pollard said. "I can also let them know there are opportunities in STEM for them. Because I have sixth graders, they think everything will be hard, but once they see the experiments they will get to conduct, I think the experiences will be fun for them."

[http://blog.gulflive.com/mississippi-press-news/2018/07/ingalls\\_engineers\\_promote\\_stem.html#incart\\_river\\_index](http://blog.gulflive.com/mississippi-press-news/2018/07/ingalls_engineers_promote_stem.html#incart_river_index)

## **Reward offered after pregnant dolphin found shot to death**

AP

More than \$6,000 is up for grabs after a pregnant dolphin was found shot to death in South Mississippi.

The bottlenose dolphin was found April 30 on a Waveland beach. A necropsy report received by marine officials this week is leading the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to search for answers. NOAA says the report shows that the mammal had been killed by a gunshot, causing both the mama and baby to die. The report says a small-caliber bullet was found in the dolphin's lung.

WLOX-TV reports a \$6,500 reward is being offered for information about the death by multiple groups including Lightkeepers, Humane Society of the United States, CetLaw, Oceans Experience and Dolphins Plus Marine Mammal Responder.

Anonymous tips can be called into the NOAA Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964.

<https://www.sunherald.com/news/health/article215304825.html>

## **Hatchery collects rare species of catfish**

Daily Journal

TUPELO – Three days of tromping through murky waters in remote locations in north Mississippi proved successful for the Private John Allen National Fish Hatchery.

Along with state conservation agents, interns and volunteers, they were able to locate and capture one of the rarest species of fish in the state of Mississippi. They captured three Piebald Madtom (*noturus gladiator*). While most people have never heard of the fish, biologists have been searching for years.

"It is extremely rare," said Dan Schwarz, fish biologist at the hatchery. "Since 1964, it has only been found in 12 different locations in Mississippi. In the last 15 years, it has only been found in four locations – the Hatchie River, the Wolf River, the Coldwater River and the Big Black River."

These particular fish was collected in the Wolf River near Michigan City, in north Benton County.

Officials hope to use these three fish – one immature and two adults – to create a brood stock at the hatchery. The fish are being held in tanks inside the brood house. Officials hope they have at least one male and one female but there is no way to determine the sex other than waiting. During the spawning season, females swell with eggs.

"Basically, it will be next June before we know for sure," Schwarz said. "But we are going back out sampling in the next few weeks. Hopefully, we will collect some more."

The fish live in about 2 feet of water. These samples were collected by kick seining. People walked in the river and kicked up the debris, stirring up the fish. A net downstream then collects whatever fish are present.

These catfish differ from the standard channel catfish in a number of ways. The biggest difference is size. Adult Piebald Madtoms only reach about 4 inches in length. They are also more colorful.

Piebald describes the black and yellow coloring. Madtom refers to the fact the pectoral and dorsal fins can emit venom. The Madtoms also have a limited life span, about three years.

"We want to get enough to build a brood stock," Schwarz said. "If we can get them to spawn in captivity, we can learn more about their life stages and might be able to tell where to find them in the wild."

Because the habitat of the fish includes the Wolf and Obion Rivers in Tennessee, the hatchery is working closely with Mississippi and Tennessee state conservation agencies. Austin Peay University in Clarksville, Tennessee, is conducting a genetics study on the Madtoms to see if the Mississippi fish are genetically different from the Tennessee ones.

## **State Government**

### **Analysis: Gambling not a clear-cut state budget booster**

AP

Will Mississippi take a chance on a lottery? It's a big question lawmakers could answer if Republican Gov. Phil Bryant calls them into special session in the next few weeks. Officials are looking for ways to generate about \$200 million a year to pay for improvements to highways and bridges. Bryant says he will call a session sometime in August if House and Senate leaders can agree on the broad outlines of a funding plan.

Bryant suggests using money from tax collections on internet sales, newly legalized sports betting and creation of a lottery.

A new study from a nonprofit group, The Pew Charitable Trusts, examines "sin taxes" on alcohol, tobacco and gambling, including lotteries and sports betting. It says the taxes are a "tempting but unreliable source of revenue" for states.

"Any of these new, or even existing, sin taxes are unlikely to be a silver bullet for larger budget issues — certainly, when attempting to resolve some of the larger structural budget challenges that many states are facing," Mary Murphy, Pew's project director for state and local fiscal health, said Wednesday during a conference call about the study.

Mississippi is one of six states without a lottery, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The others are Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, and Utah.

The first legal dockside casinos opened in Mississippi in August 1992, and in November of that year, voters removed the state constitution's prohibition on a lottery. But legislators have never enacted a state law to create a lottery, partly because of opposition from religious groups, including the large and influential Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Republican House Speaker Philip Gunn of Clinton, who's a leader in his Baptist church, opposes the lottery. But Bryant says he believes Gunn will allow the House to vote on the issue if it arises during a special session on transportation funding.

After the 2017 legislative session ended, Gunn created a lottery study group. It examined how much money neighboring states collected, after prizes were awarded and expenses were paid, during the budget year that ended June 30, 2016. The figure for Arkansas was \$85.2 million. For Louisiana, it was \$177.9 million. For Tennessee, it was \$395 million.

Mississippi residents spend an estimated \$5 million to \$10 million a year playing the lottery in Arkansas and about \$30 million playing the lottery in Louisiana, Mississippi's state economist, Darrin Webb, said in November.

The study group made no recommendations for or against creating a Mississippi lottery, and legislators had little discussion about it during the 2018 regular session that ended in late March.

In May, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down federal law that prohibited gambling on football, basketball, baseball, and other sports in most states. Mississippi had already changed its law in 2017 to allow sports betting, as part of a bill to legalize and regulate fantasy sports.

After the Supreme Court ruling, the Mississippi Gaming Commission set rules specifying that in this state, betting on any pro, college or Olympic sport will be confined to casinos.

Sports betting is expected to begin soon in Mississippi, and it is projected to produce less than \$10 million a year in state revenue. Casinos will pay state and local taxes worth 12 percent of the wagers, minus the payouts.

The Pew report points out that "gambling taxes also come with caveats." States with lotteries have seen little revenue growth from them in recent years, and casinos have struggled with competition as opportunities for legal gambling have proliferated.

<https://www.sunherald.com/article215248715.html>



## ***Oil Spill***

### **William Carey opens Mississippi's second pharmacy school**

AP

Mississippi's second pharmacy school is opening on the state's Gulf Coast, with William Carey University beginning classes on Monday at its School of Pharmacy in Biloxi.

For now, the 58 students will be meeting in temporary locations, awaiting the October scheduled opening of the \$7 million, three-story pharmacy building.

Baptist-affiliated William Carey will offer an accelerated pharmacy course, with students finishing in three academic years instead of the traditional four years. Classes will meet year-round in four terms of 10 weeks each.

Gloria Rawls of Hattiesburg will be one of the first students. She tells the Hattiesburg American that she couldn't move to Oxford to take pharmacy classes at the University of Mississippi, because she has two young children. But she plans to commute from Hattiesburg to the campus at the Tradition development on the northern edge of Biloxi.

Student Candace Webber tells WLOX-TV that she left pharmacy school at Xavier University in New Orleans, but never stopped wanting to be a pharmacist, working for more than a decade as a pharmacy technician.

"After being a technician for so long and knowing the process and I've always desired to be a pharmacist, I decided it's time to go back to school," Webber said.

Douglas DeGeorge plans to retire from the Biloxi police force and is starting pharmacy classes. He said he was attracted to the school in part because pharmacists are in high demand.

"I think we pulled the numbers the other day and Mississippi had about 4,000 pharmacies, which in this day and age is exceptionally low," he said. "With the population living longer, people are going to need their medicines."

Pharmacy Dean Michael Malloy said graduates of the school are likely to stay in the area.

"Since there wasn't a school here (before), you couldn't build a culture of pharmacy here," he said. "Students have a tendency once they graduate to either go back home or stay where they're trained."

William Carey already offers nursing, physical therapy and osteopathic medicine programs on its Hattiesburg campus. William Carey Provost Scott Hummel said the combination of the programs will be beneficial.

The state is giving William Carey \$1 million from money it received following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill to help the school gain accreditation.

<https://www.sunherald.com/news/state/mississippi/article215287365.html>

## ***Regional***

### **Balch & Bingham lawyer, Drummond executive convicted in federal bribery case**

Al.com

A Balch & Bingham attorney and the Drummond Company Vice President of Government Affairs have been found guilty on all federal charges involving bribery of an Alabama legislator.

The verdict was announced late Friday afternoon after a four-week trial.

Balch partner Joel Gilbert and Drummond VP David Roberson were convicted on all six criminal charges: conspiracy, bribery, three counts of honest services wire fraud, and money laundering.

They were on trial together, but jurors were told to consider their actions and cases separately.

Prosecutors said the two men bribed former state Rep. Oliver Robinson to oppose the Environmental Protection Agency's expansion of a Superfund site, and also to oppose prioritizing the site's expensive cleanup.

U.S. Attorney Jay Town said after the verdict that the case was not about the EPA nor about pollution. "This was a case about greed at the expense of too many," he stated in a prepared release.

"The findings of guilt for these three individuals, by trial or plea, should forewarn anyone who would be corruptly motivated to act in similar unlawful interest," Town stated. "Voters deserve public officials who seek to represent them honestly and fairly. When elected officials, corporate executives or their lawyers violate our federal laws, they should expect to suffer the fate of these three guilty defendants. We appreciate the dedication of the federal agencies that worked tirelessly on this case."

Drummond Co. immediately issued a statement after the verdict.

"We are disappointed by the jury's decision to convict our employee, David Roberson. While we respect the judicial process, we consider David to be a man of integrity who would not knowingly engage in wrongdoing," according to the Drummond statement.

When an environmentalist group raised allegations regarding our operations in the Birmingham area, Drummond responded by hiring one of Alabama's most well-respected environmental law firms. As testimony in the trial showed, we were assured the firm's community outreach efforts on our behalf were legal and proper."

Stan Blanton, Managing Partner, Balch & Bingham LLP, also issued a statement that says Gilbert is no longer with the firm. "We respect the trial process and the jury's verdict. The jury determined that Joel Gilbert engaged in conduct that is contrary to the standards to which each of us at Balch & Bingham is committed and expected to uphold," he stated.

"Although our firm was not a party to the case, I and the rest of our partners, associates and staff are deeply disappointed in any conduct that does not adhere to our commitment to the rule of law and to the communities in which we are fortunate to live and work," Blanton stated.

"We all greatly value the trust our clients place in us and have redoubled our efforts to earn that trust. Mr. Gilbert is no longer a partner with or employed by Balch & Bingham."

Another Balch lawyer, Steven McKinney, was also charged in the conspiracy—but he was dismissed from the case one day before closing arguments began. U.S. District Judge Abdul Kallon, who is presiding over the case, didn't elaborate on the details of McKinney's dismissal. And McKinney's lawyers didn't comment to AL.com, and court records weren't immediately available.

According to prosecutors, the men formed a contract through Balch with Robinson's nonprofit organization to pressure state officials to oppose the EPA, to meet with EPA representatives, and vote on a joint resolution in the legislature to denounce the expansion and Superfund site being named on the EPA's National Priorities List.

Defense teams for both men said Robinson acted alone, and the contract with his foundation was for legitimate community outreach work. They said Robinson's allegations about Gilbert and Roberson shouldn't be trusted.

During the four weeks of testimony, dozens of witnesses took the stand to talk about their conversations or relationships with Gilbert and Roberson. Scores of billing records from Balch, which showed Gilbert and McKinney logging hours working on Drummond matters, were shown in court, along with emails between the men.

Robinson took the stand during the trial, saying he was first approached by Roberson in 2014 and asked if he would be interested in working with Balch and Drummond on the EPA matter. Robinson met with Gilbert, and a contract between his organization-- The Oliver Robinson Foundation-- and Balch was signed in early 2015.

Days after the contract was signed and Robinson picked up a \$14,000 check from Balch, Robinson said he went to an Alabama Environmental Management Commission meeting and spoke on behalf of Balch and Drummond, using talking points he said Gilbert wrote.

Gilbert and Roberson's lawyers said no one forced Robinson to go to that meeting, and the check was for community work--not the meeting appearance.

Robinson has pleaded guilty to several federal charges. His sentencing is set for Sept. 27.

**Call it a dirt barbecue: Workers heat the ground to remove contamination at CTS site**  
Asheville Citizen Times

SKYLAND – If the temperature here reaches 100 degrees sometime this summer, the air would still only be a little more than half as hot as the dirt below the surface on a patch of land off Mills Gap Road.

At the CTS hazardous waste site, workers are using massive amounts of electricity to raise the underground temperature to 190 degrees so contaminants in the soil boil off and are vacuumed up as vapor.

The work is the first time large amounts of contamination from the ground have been removed at the site, which has been the subject of neighborhood concern since at least 1999, said Jeff Wilcox, a UNC Asheville professor of environmental science.

Even though it is considered only an interim cleanup, "This is the most progress by far" in the process of removing contaminants from the property at 235 Mills Gap Road, Wilcox said.

**Why is the former CTS plant contaminated?**

Workers made industrial switches and resistors in a manufacturing plant there for Illinois-based CTS Corp. from 1959 until the plant closed in 1986.

Testing by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency uncovered contamination in soil and surface water in 1990, but it wasn't until 1999, when an industrial degreaser was found in a drinking water well near the site, that a significant push for a cleanup began.

EPA has been criticized by residents and others for being slow to deal with problems at the site, which is part of the EPA's Superfund program.

"We're happy that something is being done," said Tate MacQueen, one of several neighborhood residents who have lobbied for a cleanup for years. "The question that will always remain is why didn't (the EPA) address the source sooner."

In 2016, the EPA reached a cleanup agreement with CTS; current property owner Mills Gap Road Associates; and aerospace giant Northrop Grumman, the successor to a company that operated a plant on the site in the 1950s. It requires the three companies to spend \$9 million to remove 95 percent of contamination.

**How is the TCE being cleaned up?**

The substances to be taken out are old fuel oil and trichloroethylene, or TCE. TCE is a solvent that is suspected of causing various illnesses, including cancer.

The project involves zapping 1.2 acres with enough electricity to vaporize chemicals.

According to the EPA, workers earlier this year drilled holes 30-50 feet into the ground on and around the former location of the plant, which has been torn down. The 229 holes are 17 feet apart and each is a foot in diameter.

Then they put electrodes made of copper sheeting into the holes, surrounded the sheeting with a mixture of graphite and steel shot — it looks like black cat litter — to help conduct electricity to the soil and ran wires from each to a power control unit.

Pipes connect the wells and a vacuum system that channels the vapor to a condenser. The vapor is then cooled, which separates it into liquid and air.

The air is routed through an incinerator and scrubber to remove TCE; the liquid is treated to remove the fuel oil, which goes to a hazardous waste dump. The leftover water goes into a regular sewer pipe. The cleaned air, sometimes with a little visible steam, goes up a chimney, and everything else is hauled off to a hazardous waste dump.

Wilcox said the technology is probably the most advanced way to get at TCE contamination. Just pumping groundwater out and treating it wouldn't work because the chemical adheres to soil particles, he said.

Workers flipped the switch to turn on the juice for this dirt barbecue in late May. It is scheduled to run until October or November.

The operation can't go any later than that because Duke Energy says its electrical grid can't handle enough electricity to meet normal wintertime demands in that area plus power the cleanup.

The process is expected to use between 8.5 million kilowatts of electricity, the EPA says. For perspective, that's just a little less than the amount of power the 1,900 or so homes in the town of Weaverville will use over the same period.

The EPA says it expects the process will remove about 10 tons of contaminants before it wraps up this fall.

But, the job won't be over then.

#### **Surrounding area will be treated next**

Next spring, workers will inject potassium permanganate into a 1.9-acre area to the north of the plant site to clean up TCE in the ground there. Potassium permanganate is commonly used in water treatment plants and as a skin disinfectant.

The EPA says it will break down the remaining TCE to render it harmless. Byproducts of that process are carbon dioxide and water, EPA spokeswoman Davina Marraccini said.

Wilcox, the UNCA professor, said he is glad to see the EPA taking action and endorses the methods being used.

"Previous actions ... have been to deal with the symptoms of the problem" rather than actually removing the source, he said. "It wasn't going to take care of itself. There is so much material, so much TCE, below the plant it needed an active solution."

But he and MacQueen said it is important to remember that the work being done now and next spring does not address contamination in bedrock below the area being treated.

"This is not the final cleanup," Wilcox said.

Once the current work is finished, those paying for the cleanup and even the EPA may want to quit there, he said. Wilcox said he can't say yet whether more work should be required.

"There's going to be a lot of pressure to call this good enough," he said. "It may be, or it may not."

The CTS plant manufactured industrial switches and resistors for more than 20 years before closing in 1986.

<https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2018/07/22/asheville-cts-site-cleanup-heats-tainted-soil-remove-tce-fuel-oil/788523002/>

#### **EPA changes won't water down North Carolina coal ash law**

News & Record

**GREENSBORO** — Experts say recent changes that soften federal regulations governing coal ash disposal will not have any effect on the scope or pace of efforts to eliminate storage basins for the waste product in North Carolina.

Duke Energy, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality and a major environmental group said Friday that the state's Coal Ash Management Act takes precedence over recent changes by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that weaken parts of the federal mandate for utilities to safely dispose of the waste product.

The EPA's recent backtracking on its "Coal Combustion Residuals Rule" has no effect on requirements for Duke Energy to comply "with all other laws, including the Coal Ash Management Act and the federal Clean Water Act," said Frank Holleman, a senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center in Chapel Hill.

"The Trump Administration's rollbacks of the standards in the CCR Rule have no effect on Duke Energy's obligations to comply with the deadlines in the NC Coal Ash Management Act and Duke Energy's obligation not to illegally discharge coal ash pollutants into groundwater, rivers, and lakes from its old, unlined, and leaking coal ash pits," Holleman wrote in an email. The Trump administration on Wednesday eased rules for handling coal ash at more than 400 U.S. coal-fired power plants after utilities pushed back against regulations adopted under President Barack Obama.

Acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said the changes would save utilities roughly \$30 million annually.

The move represents the latest action by Trump's EPA to boost the struggling coal industry by rolling back environmental and public health protections enacted under his predecessor.

It pushes back the deadline to close the more problematic ash dumps by 18 months and gives state regulators flexibility in how they deal with the massive waste piles that result from burning coal for electricity.

But in North Carolina, the statewide coal ash measure enacted after a major spill four years ago at Duke Energy's retired Dan River Steam Station requires that coal ash basins at the Rockingham County site and 13 others statewide be eliminated by 2029. It calls for the material to be placed instead in safe, dry storage or recycled in ways that do not threaten the environment.

In addition, the state law mandates that storage basins with the most serious problems be closed first; for example, the two Dan River storage basins must be supplanted by August 2019 and Duke Energy is building a new landfill for ash nearby.

"Our basin closure timelines are unchanged in North Carolina — all our work here will comply with the state's strict Coal Ash Management Act deadlines and our closure work is already well underway," Duke Energy spokesman Bill Norton said Friday. "We remain firmly committed to safe, permanent closure of all our ash basins in a manner that protects people and the environment."

The EPA's Wheeler, a former coal industry lobbyist, signed the new, federal order a week after taking the helm of the agency after Scott Pruitt resigned as administrator amid ethics investigations.

Environmentalists argued this week that at the national level in places without protective state laws, the administration is endangering the health of people living near power plants and ash storage sites. But industry representatives welcomed the announcement.

U.S. coal plants produce about 100 million tons annually of ash and other waste, much of which ends up in unlined disposal ponds prone to leak. Some have been in use for decades. Data released by utilities in March under an EPA mandate showed widespread evidence of groundwater contamination at coal plants. Heightened levels of pollutants — including arsenic and radium in some cases — were documented at plants in numerous states, from Virginia to Alaska.

EPA documents show most savings for utilities from the new rules will come from their extending by 18 months the deadline to close ash dumps that don't meet water protection standards. The new deadline is Oct. 31, 2020.

The utility industry said the changes give "regulatory certainty" for ash dump operators. That's in part because it aligns the closure requirements with upcoming guidelines limiting the levels of toxic metals in wastewater discharged from power plants.

The changes also give state regulators the power to suspend monitoring requirements for dumps that don't meet water quality standards.

"It's not like EPA has granted us free pass here. It just gives us additional time to operate those facilities and better sync them up" with new wastewater guidelines that are on the horizon, said James Roewer, the executive director of the Utility Solid Waste Advisory Group, an industry organization that pushed for the changes.

The original Obama-era rule, adopted in 2015, came in response to a massive coal ash spill in Kingston, Tenn., in 2008. A containment dike burst at a Tennessee Valley Authority power plant and released 5.4 million cubic yards of ash.

The accident dumped waste into two nearby rivers, destroyed homes and brought national attention to the issue.

Attorney Larissa Liebmann with the Waterkeeper Alliance said the costs saved by utilities won't simply go away. Instead, she said, they'll be borne by communities that are forced to deal with contaminated water.

"We think it's fundamentally unfair," Liebmann said. "The rules that were created in 2015 were already very much to the bare minimum."

[https://www.greensboro.com/news/north\\_carolina/epa-changes-won-t-water-down-north-carolina-coal-ash/article\\_cabcc805-ca2e-53bc-8266-d114342448f3.html](https://www.greensboro.com/news/north_carolina/epa-changes-won-t-water-down-north-carolina-coal-ash/article_cabcc805-ca2e-53bc-8266-d114342448f3.html)

**Group studying low-oxygen levels in bodies of water meets at Nicholls**  
Houma Courier

A forum focused on the issue and ramifications of low oxygen levels in bodies of water was held today at Nicholls State University.

Hypoxia, or oxygen depletion, is an environmental phenomenon where the concentration of dissolved oxygen in the water column decreases to a level that can no longer support living aquatic organisms. The Louisiana Hypoxia Working Group consists of scientists and other concerned people who come together monthly to discuss the issue and offer potential solutions.

"There are a lot of things up in Congress right now that are important to the hypoxia effort," said group coordinator Doug Daigle. "One is the Water Resources Development Act, which is a recurring bill that comes up every few years and deals with things like ecosystem restoration on the coast and upstream, wastewater treatment plants, floodplain management and river management in general."

The Water Resources Development Act deals with various aspects of water resources such as environmental, structural, navigational and flood protection, to name a few.

A few events have led to the northern region of the Gulf of Mexico becoming a hypoxic zone, such as freshwater discharge from the Mississippi River, the decomposition of bacteria on the ocean floor and eutrophication, which is an excess of nutrients in a body of water.

This group has been meeting since 2003 to combat hypoxia, after the first hypoxia action plan was put together.

"We're really kind of a forum now to exchange information and find out what's going on," said Daigle. "We usually meet at LSU, but we've started branching out to other places across the state. Last year we met at UL and before that we met at Tulane."

Daigle, who is also a research associate for LSU's Department of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences, said holding the meeting at Nicholls gives people a chance to get involved without having to travel too far.

Members of the group are studying how water quality affects everything from shellfish to rice. Their focus is on issues relating to low oxygen levels, but the group also discusses general water quality and how it impacts various areas of human life.

Professor Nancy Rabalais of LSU said the hypoxia group is studying how low oxygen levels affect different aquatic species in the Gulf of Mexico.

"I'm working with the physiologists from the University of Miami to look at the physiological component of habitat compression," said Rabalais. "In other words, what can a fish take, according to oxygen levels?"

The Louisiana Sea Grant is looking to work with commercial fisherman on the hypoxia issue.

"The Louisiana Sea Grant is becoming more and more active with the commercial fishing industry in terms of how the industry is going to adapt with coastal restoration projects," said Earl Melancon of the Louisiana Sea Grant and professor emeritus in the Biological Sciences Department at Nicholls. "Louisiana Sea Grant has taken a lead in some of this."

Melancon took the water quality discussion to the point of acidification and its implications in bodies of water.

"Right now acidification is not an issue in Louisiana, per se, at least for the shellfish," said Melancon. "That's not to say that it's not going to change once you add diversions all along and once you add the other aspects of coastal restoration. The commercial oystermen are beginning to understand in-depth how delicate the oyster physiology is to environmental change."

<http://www.houmatoday.com/news/20180719/group-studying-low-oxygen-levels-in-bodies-of-water-meets-at-nicholls>

### ***National***

**Volkswagen settlement cash to buy electric buses for transit authorities in Pioneer Valley, Martha's Vineyard**  
MassLive



Transit authorities in the Pioneer Valley and on Martha's Vineyard could see \$11 million for new electric buses with money from the \$10 billion, nationwide Volkswagen emissions fraud settlement.

The PVRTA bus replacement is part of Gov. Charlie Baker's draft plan, announced Thursday, to spend Massachusetts' share of the court-ordered settlement, which amounts to \$75 million. In the first-year plan, another \$5 million would go to electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and \$7.5 would be set aside for other projects to reduce air pollution from the transportation sector.

Thursday's announcement from Boston coincided with a new report from the Union of Concerned Scientists showing that electric buses have lower emissions than diesel and natural gas buses, even in cities with power grids that depend on coal and natural gas power plants.

As far as carbon emissions that worsen climate change, putting one new electric bus on an average U.S. road is equivalent to taking 2.5 diesel-powered buses off the road, the report said.

Nationwide, more than 85 transit agencies have begun electrifying buses.

The German automaker admitted in 2015 to installing "defeat devices" in around 500,000 U.S. cars -- Volkswagens, Audis, and Porsches -- that allowed them to cheat government exhaust emissions tests. Of 11 million such vehicles sold worldwide, around 14,000 were registered in Massachusetts.

Earlier this month, a federal court in Washington upheld the VW diesel settlement on appeal. The cars were emitting 40 times the allowed level of nitrogen oxides, which form ground-level ozone and particulate matter linked to respiratory and cardiovascular problems. The pollutants contribute to global warming, acid rain, and nutrient overloading in waterways, according to environmental regulators.

In Massachusetts, money from the VW Settlement Trust will go to projects that reduce nitrogen oxide air pollution.

The PVRTA placed three electric buses in service in 2016. At the time, each bus cost \$860,000, about twice the price of a diesel bus. However, the buses were expected to save \$350,000 over each vehicle's 12-year lifespan due to reduced fuel costs.

Diesel buses get only about 3.86 miles per gallon. Electric buses can travel up to 80 miles on a single charge. High-speed charging stations were built at the Holyoke Transportation Center and the new Union Station in Springfield.

PVRTA officials did not respond Friday to a telephone message and email seeking comment on their electric bus replacement program.

[https://www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2018/07/vw\\_emissions\\_settlement\\_to\\_buy.html](https://www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2018/07/vw_emissions_settlement_to_buy.html)

## ***Press Releases***

### **MDWFP Announces Steele Bayou WMA**

MDWFP

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP), in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration, recently acquired approximately 17,816 acres in Issaquena and Warren counties from Anderson-Tully Company. The land will be managed by MDWFP and tentatively titled "Steele Bayou Wildlife Management Area". The property is a matrix of bayous, cypress sloughs, and well-managed bottomland hardwoods. The forested ecosystem represents a significant conservation investment for all Mississippians.

MDWFP and TNC will be working on a long-term management strategy with plans to open the WMA for the 2019-2020 hunting season.

<https://www.mdwfp.com/media/news/administration/mdwfp-announces-steele-bayou-wma/>

### **USDA Extends Its Landmark Water Quality Initiatives Through 2023**

Jackson, July 19, 2018 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced plans to extend two of its landmark water quality initiatives for five years. The Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) have played a pivotal role in accelerating conservation in water quality by providing targeted funding and technical resources to agricultural producers in the areas that need it most. In Mississippi, MRBI and NWQI have focused conservation in seven (7) watersheds in 2018. The MRBI watersheds are Christmas Lake-Stillwater Bayou, Long Lake, Brook-Tommie Bayou, Burrell Bayou, and Beaver-Mound Bayou. The NWQI watersheds are Tippah Creek-Tippah River and Sunflower River-Porter Bayou.

“NRCS targeted water quality efforts have steadily demonstrated tremendous benefits in Mississippi and across America’s landscape and water bodies,” said Kurt Readus, state conservationist for USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “By focusing resources where we can have the best impacts, we’re improving the quality of rivers and streams across the country while also giving producers the tools they need to make good investments on their working lands.”

NRCS works with producers in targeted watersheds to implement conservation practices that prevent runoff of sediment and nutrients, which can degrade water quality.

These initiatives currently help producers improve water quality in more than 350 watersheds across the country. To date, at least ten (10) water bodies have been removed or scheduled for removal from the nation’s list of impaired streams.

NRCS will continue to update and expand their approach to both initiatives based on recommendations from conservation partners and staff. Some notable updates include:

- Providing greater technical assistance for watershed assessment in MRBI to help ensure critical source areas are identified;
- Establishing watershed goals and interim metrics; and
- Ensuring that an outreach strategy is in place.

NRCS will also provide greater certainty for NWQI financial assistance by using multi-year budgets, not to exceed five years, for priority watersheds. The initiative will also expand the focus from only water bodies impaired under the Clean Water Act to a broader group of water bodies, particularly those that provide drinking water.

#### Targeted Watersheds

Improved water quality is due, in large part, to the agency’s targeted small watershed approach, which focuses resources on the most critical areas to maximize conservation impact and allow producers to be natural resource stewards.

Through USDA’s Conservation Effects Assessment Project, cropland models demonstrate that conservation on cropland throughout the entire Mississippi River basin has reduced nitrogen and sediment loading to the Gulf of Mexico by 28 percent and 45 percent, respectively, over what would be lost without conservation systems in place.

#### Assistance Available for Farmers

Agricultural producers interested in learning more are encouraged to contact their local USDA service center or visit the NRCS national website at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

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